

## DESIGN REVIEW

# Panel Member Terms of Reference

The aim of the Design West Review Panel is to enhance the quality of design and placemaking by providing expert advice and recommendations.

## National Design Review Charter

Design West expects the Core Principles in the [Design Network National Design Review Charter](#) to be delivered by its Panellists. Design West, alongside its five regional partners - Design South East, Design Midlands, Design Yorkshire, Design North East and Design North West - are place-based and not-for-profit organisations that support placemaking for the benefit of people, prosperity and planet.

### The Role of the Panel

The Design West Review Panel provides independent and professional design, sustainability, and placemaking advice. It evaluates proposals and highlights best practice but is NOT a decision-making body, as this responsibility lies with the Local Planning Authority (LPA). The Review Panel has an advisory role and issues reports to applicants as advice.

Design West's recommendations will carry the same weight as other technical assessments and become a material consideration for planning applications, once submitted as part of a planning application.

### Panel Membership

Design West draws from a pool of around 200 regionally based members from built and natural environment professions, such as architects, landscape architects, urban designers, engineers and ecologists. Panellists act as independent experts rather than representing stakeholder groups, and must adhere to the [Nolan Principles of Public Life](#).

Membership is reviewed regularly, with new members appointed based on merit and equal opportunity. Selection of new members is undertaken on the basis of an open and transparent interview process. Panellists are listed on our [Design West Review website](#). If a specialist is needed, we may draw from the wider national pool of Panel members provided through the [Design Network](#).

Panel members receive an honorarium fee for their contributions.

Panellists are required to avoid serving on other design review panels in the region to avoid conflicts.

### Review Considerations

The Panel evaluates proposals based on the following themes:

- **Context:** How the proposal integrates with its surroundings, including scale, massing, topography, landscape, open space and existing buildings.
- **Movement & Access:** Pedestrian, cycle, and vehicular access and connectivity.
- **Beauty & Character:** Considering function, structure and aesthetics, as well as the interior and exterior of the building. Response to locality, topography and setting.
- **Sustainability:** Environmental performance, and whether the sustainability agenda is central to the design approach.
- **Detail:** Quality and appropriateness of materials, elevations, boundaries and landscape.

### Design Review Guidance

Refer to the [Client Guidance Note](#) on the operational delivery of the Review Panel, and the [2025 Design Network National Design Review Charter](#) for further details.

### Standards for Contributions

Panel members are expected to maintain high standards of professionalism throughout the Design Review process. This includes punctuality, observing appropriate safety measures during site visits, and adhering to the agenda and disciplines agreed in advance. Members should contribute constructively during discussions, speaking in turn on the invitation of the Chair, and remaining focused on the matters at hand.

Timely contribution to the post-review letter is essential. Panel members are expected to provide their feedback promptly to ensure the letter can be issued to all attendees by the agreed deadline.

At the conclusion of each session, panel members will be asked to submit a claim for their participation. Claim forms or invoices should be returned to the Panel Manager within two weeks of the Design Review date.

### Written Contributions

If a particular specialist view is required on a scheme, the Panel Manager, in consultation with the Chair, may invite a Panellist to provide a Written Note. This is to advise the Panel and will not be shared with the applicant or LPA. The contents of a Written Note will be shared verbally at the session and considered in the final letter, to ensure all matters have been taken into account in the Panel's final recommendations.

### Site Visits

Site visits are typically undertaken once per scheme, where necessary. Subsequent reviews of the same project do not usually require additional visits. The decision as to whether or not a site visit is necessary should be taken by the Panel Manager in consultation with the Chair.

Panel members are encouraged to follow the Panel Manager's guidance regarding appropriate precautions (such as clothing/ gear needed) for the site visit. When applicable, risk assessments are provided by the applicants beforehand.

Panel members should remain engaged with the site discussions and avoid becoming distracted or separating from the group.

### Conflicts of Interest

Panel members should discuss any possible Conflicts of Interests in dialogue with the Panel Manager, who will check this with the applicant and the LPA. Any agreed non-prejudicial declarations will be made known at the Review Panel meeting, and it will be recorded and entered in the final report. If it is of a prejudicial nature, then the Panel member will not take part in the review.

Conflicts may arise from:

- **Financial or professional interests:** A connection to the project, client, or site.
- **Personal relationships:** Links to individuals promoting the proposal or associated organisations.

Remaining 'Clean of Conflict' is occasionally challenging for Panel members who are working in a commercial setting. Once they have reviewed a scheme, a Panel member should not comment on the proposal in a commercial/ professional capacity thereafter.

If approached by the applicant, they must raise this with the Panel Manager to agree if their participation has finally concluded, as it will forfeit their ability to sit on a further Design Review Panel on that scheme.

Panel Members may recommend or present to the Review Panel on behalf of their own commercial or community interest. This is reasonable, but they must declare that they are a Panel member and outline their role and in what capacity they are acting.

### Conduct

The professional conduct of the Design Review process is fundamental to the integrity and credibility of Design West and its Panel.

While the Review Panel aims to be constructive in its advice, it may on occasion be required to deliver recommendations that challenge or question a proposal. It is also essential that all sessions are conducted in a manner that respects the expertise and responsibilities of those presenting.

### Conduct (continued)

Panellists are expected to express their views honestly and clearly whilst maintaining a professional and courteous approach throughout, speaking in turn on the invitation of the Chair.

Contributions should be concise and focused on the review themes, avoiding subjective personal opinions on architectural taste or style, and ensuring that all feedback remains grounded in design quality and placemaking principles.

Panellists should:

- Treat reviews as confidential
- Not interrupt
- Remain focused (avoiding phone use)
- Not respond directly to approaches from applicants or local authority officers or members. Please forward any approach to the Panel Manager
- Forward any complaints to the Panel Manager

### Confidentiality

Design Review meetings are attended only by invitation. Participants will include Panel Members, LPA Officers, and applicants. Statutory bodies, clients, and their design teams may also attend. Design West staff observe all sessions but do not participate. Attendance must be confirmed in advance.

Design Review attendees will receive background material from the applicant/ developer on the scheme to be reviewed in advance. This will be sent via the Panel Manager and must be kept confidential, even if the review is on a 'live' planning application.

A Design Review report, in letter form, is written by the Panel Chair (or Panel Secretary) who has final sign off in consultation with the Panel. The report will not differ from the points raised at the review.

A Panel Member will not enter into dialogue with any of the applicant's team before or after the review – all communication should be through the Panel Manager. This is to ensure that the Chair and Panel are kept clean of any conflict and can remain impartial.

### Planning Context and Guidance

The Design West Review panel will adhere to the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF) and the plan-led system but will also feel free to challenge and give scrutiny as they see fit. The [National Design Guide](#) and [National Model Design Code](#) are further important references.

The Panel may also refer to other design methodologies and advice such as [Building for a Healthy Life](#), Manual for Streets, Gear Change and LTN 1/20.

For further information, contact us at [review@designwest.org.uk](mailto:review@designwest.org.uk).